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MARXIST PHILOSOPHER, ADAM SCHAFF, DISCUSSES "PHILOSOPHY OF MAN"

/Following is a translation of two articles by Adam Schaff in Przeglad Kulturalny (Cultural Review), Warsaw, Vol. X, No. 9, 2 March 1961, and No. 10, 9 March 1961, pages 1, 7./

I. Is the Fate of Man the Object of Philosophy?

What is the meaning of life? Is man free in his decision when he chooses one of several possible actions? What does it mean that man is free to decide? What is the meaning of the responsibility of an individual for his decisions, especially in cases of conflict? What must be done in a situation where each decision results in consequences which seem to be positive from one viewpoint and negative from another? What is the meaning of such an evaluation of actions, and can such evaluation be justified? And, if so, what must be done in order to receive a positive evaluation of one's actions? Finally, what is the status of the individual in regard to society and the surrounding world?

Here are some of a long list of questions which, for some people, are only an accumulation of pseudo-problems and nonsense, deprived of any right to be called philosophy, but which, for others, constitute not only the center but actually the only meaning of philosophy. History provides many examples of representatives of these two extreme attitudes. In fact they are contemporary: neo-positivists on the one side and existencialists on the other. And we have there one more dichomic division of philosophical attitudes centered this time on the discussion of the very object of philosophy. It is a division which provides at least some philosophers with an excuse for the belief, rather unflattering for their own profession, that the history of philosophy is the history of stupidity. This judgment obviously does not include the position of the judges themselves, which is automatically assumed to be correct. However, as these views, so unflattering for other positions, are universal among philosophers on the basis of reciprocity, we may reach the rather uninspiring conclusion that all of them are right. And in a sense we would be right. All philosophers could certainly profit from a modest dosage of skepticism, however difficult such a change might be.

The division which separates philosophers answering the questions above has its historical origins. Among the numerous divisions which took place between philosophical positions in historical times, one of the most interesting separates the ionic and the socratic schools. These names are conventional, of course, although the tendencies or the individualities which inspired them really represented the different concepts of philosophy in which we are now interested. Indeed the ionic

philosophers originated -- within the realm of European culture -- the notion that the object of philosophy is the search for laws which govern the world in its various manifestations. Socrates, on the other hand, introduced philosophy in what Cicero called the "very homes of people," conceiving the object of philosophy as a discussion of the ways to live justly. He was not the first one to do so, but he defended this concept to its very extreme, and his historical reputation deserves that the whole attitude be called by his name. These two positions survive during the whole history of philosophy, although they are rarely expressed in a pure form which would constitute a complete negation of the opposed position. The case of neo-positivism as one extreme and existencialism (especially in Sartre's works) as the other is rather an exception. On the other hand it provides a clear illustration of the very meaning of the dispute.

The point is whether the questions which were listed in the introduction are justified from the viewpoint of philosophy, i.e., whether there is justification for a concept of philosophy according to which the fate of the individual, his way of acting in various situations encountered in life, and the evaluation of this way of acting constitute the object of philosophy. This is the aspect of the dispute in which we are interested in this context.

Let us first have a closer look at the question itself in order to understand its implications.

When we wonder whether these questions are justified, or meaningful in the largest signification of that word, we must make it clear what frame of reference we are using in order to answer this question.

We may discuss the right of philosophy to ask such questions in terms of their value and importance for man. In that case we must examine whether we do not deal here with a philosophical construct, i.e., a speculation without relation to the concrete interests and needs of man. It is in that sense that we speak of the speculative and metaphysical character of discussions about the number of angels who can dance on a pin's head. It is unquestionable, however, that questions concerning the meaning of life or the freedom of man in his decisions have a completely different character, although the answers which they receive are often speculative and metaphysical in nature. The fact remains that the questions themselves are very deeply rooted in the experience of human existence, and that man has probably no more real problems than that which concerns the various aspects of right life. Thus if we accept this frame of reference, and the resulting criteria, then the questions under discussion will certainly appear to be justified from the philosophical viewpoint.

Yet this matter may be approached with a different perspective, which is that of the adversaries of the concept of philosophy as the object of human fate. A question may originate in actual worries and needs of man, it may be rooted in human experience, and yet its very nature may prevent any answer which would obey to the rigor of scientific thought. From the viewpoint of a philosophy which claims to be a

science, this type of question is not justified because it is not asked in right terms and therefore cannot be answered. Such was the attitude of neo-positivists when they spoke of pseudo-problems and nonsenses supported by the grammatical form of sentences, or when they stated that the totality of ethical problems, considered in the widest meaning of that word, belong to the emotional sphere of poetry and should be removed outside the limits of scientific discussion. Let us have a closer look at this position and at the supporting arguments.

In the first place, what do we mean when we say that a philosophical position is scientific whereas another is not scientific?

This concept may be interpreted in various ways, and accepted or rejected on the basis of these interpretations. We are here faced by an alternative: the scientific nature of a system may be made dependent on the recognition of the truth of its statements, or it may be made dependent on the method used by this system to justify its statements.

In the first case, there are two possibilities: the statements of the system which claims to be scientific must either express an absolute truth or a relative truth, i.e., a partial truth which corresponds to the historically determined level of human knowledge.

The claim to absolute truth constituted the nature of metaphysical systems of speculative philosophy. It contradicts so evidently the whole experience of scientific development that it is no longer defended seriously today by any respectable philosophical system.

But if we reduce this claim to the demonstration of the relative truth of the theses of the system (in the meaning given above), we find ourselves in a situation where it is difficult to deny this relative truth to individual theses of different systems (we may rather discuss to what degree their knowledge of the world is adequate), and, in view of the general character of philosophical theses which do not yield to strict criteria of selection, it is even more difficult to settle their disputes. At any rate, the use of this basis alone to decide that some theses are not justified would smack of subjectivism and would be rather dangerous from the scientific viewpoint. Nor was this the point of neo-positivists.

The second half of the alternative reduces the problem of the scientific or non-scientific nature to the method applied for investigations and discussions. In the case of philosophy, this principle applies mainly to the relations between philosophical generalizations and research results of individual sciences. In the perspective of the history of scientific development, the only scientific philosophy will be the one which advances its theses as generalizations of research of specific sciences, and in turn constitutes itself a theoretical and methodological basis for these sciences. In this meaning, philosophy retains its scientific character even though its theses may differ from those of another philosophical system, provided that the condition concerning the method is fulfilled. The field open for discussions is obviously very wide and we cannot expect any unanimity of decisions. However we are provided with a certain approach to the discussion of the problem under consideration.

When we ask questions concerning determinism in the evolution of the material world, and when we ask questions concerning the meaning of human life, we not only are asking questions pertaining to different matters (which is obvious) but also questions which cannot be answered in the same manner.

In the first case, the problem of the relation to individual sciences (i.e., to research results of physics, biology, etc.) is decisive for the determination whether the given philosophical statements are scientific. We no longer call a genius a man who would follow the extravagant claims of the classical German philosophers who used to say that reality was wrong when it did not agree with the theses of their philosophy. In this field the scientific philosophy is clearly a function of the development of specific sciences. Of course, many philosophical interpretations are possible, especially when the given stage in the evolution of specific sciences does not yield uncontroversial results and when some intermediate links are missing between the observed facts and the philosophical generalizations. In fact, the lack of these links is very characteristic, and Russel is right when he states that philosophy ends when precision and demonstrability make their appearance.

Is it the same situation when we ask about the meaning of life, the free choice of action, or the status of individuals in society?

Both yes and no. Yes -- because in this field too there are scientifically observed data provided by concrete specific sciences. No -- because the very questions have many meanings and are vague, and we do not know very well to what specific sciences we should turn.

Does this mean that we may reject such questions on the ground that they are but pseudo-problems, since they do not satisfy the criteria of scientific nature applicable to the field of deductive sciences or even specific empiric sciences, as well as in the field of some philosophical problems? Certainly not. The fact that neo-positivists ordered that all ethical problems be put on the debit side in the column of pseudo-problems does not testify to the absence of these problems, but only to the limits of neo-positivism which, as a school of thought, may be characterized by the combination of a maximum self-praise and decisiveness of statements and a minimum of actual and permanent achievements. Besides, the slogan of fight against metaphysics, which this school formerly used in its attacks against ethical problems among others, are today inoperative since even its former supporters accuse it now of metaphysics itself, and bad metaphysics for that matter.

But we are not interested here in the sins of neo-positivism. The error of its argument is evident. The problems under discussion are different from those which are studied by, say, the methodology of natural sciences, but this does not mean that they are pseudo-problems or unjustified problems. As long as men will die, suffer and lose their beloved, the question concerning the meaning of life will remain justified. This question implies in this case also a questioning of the value of life, a questioning of reasons why one should not voluntarily put an end to sufferings. As long as men will be faced with conflicts

in their life, which require a decision and demand an action (and often by advantaging some people one harms unvoluntarily others), they will ask how to live rightly and how to make decisions in such situations. As long as men will meet in society other men whose aims are contradictory to theirs, they will ask about the limits of their freedom and about the relation of the individual to the society. These questions are different from those which ask, for example, about determinism in the evolution of the world. The research problems are different, and they must be approached and settled differently. But, let us repeat, this does not mean that they are pseudo-problems or unjustified problems.

In other terms, philosophy allows for various questions which receive variously justified answers with various degrees of probability of truth and generalization, according to the factual data accumulated in the given field. When the accumulation of factual knowledge reaches certain limits, when theses can be verified by the means of the concrete method of a specific science, a problem leaves theoretically the realm of philosophy and becomes a problem of the specific science. In this manner, the former common philosophical trunk has lost and still loses individual problems and entire branches of specific sciences. When a philosopher approaches then such a problem -- and sometimes he is forced to do so -- he enters the field of the specific science and does not even think of solving it by the dint of philosophical imagination (I am not speaking of cases where philosophy borders on mysticism). Thus we have witnessed the disappearance of the whole traditional Naturphilosophie, which was the domain of a priori considerations, although philosophers today still are interested in problems of natural sciences, especially insofar as their methodology is concerned.

Keeping in mind these reservations, we must however admit that all problems may become, on an appropriate level of generalization, the object of one or another branch of philosophy. If some existencialist philosophers are ridiculous when they try to prevent philosophy from being interested in problems which belong to the field of natural sciences (which would result logically in the elimination of ontological and gnoseological problems), there is as much ridicule attached to those philosophers who, under the influence of neo-positivism, would like to purge philosophy from all traditional ethical problems and the related problems of the individual and the fate of man. It is characteristic that both sides are placing their crusade under the standard on fight against metaphysics, although they plod along in their own brand of metaphysics. Besides both these crusades are in advance doomed to failure because real problems cannot be exorcized even by the most violent formulas.

This rather long discussion of the justification of human problems as a part of philosophy was motivated by the prejudices of neo-positivists which are wide-spread in our country, and popular even among Marxists.

Insofar as Marxists are concerned, the objections come from two sources: some objections come from outside, i.e., from neo-positivism, and some objections result from the Marxist suspicion of problems which, for a long time, constituted the private domain of idealism, i.e., a philosophical school which opposed the Marxist world view.

Yet many works have been written to the effect that both historically and basically the philosophical analysis of the individual, together with all related problems, belongs fully to the great Marxist tradition. Indeed, historically speaking, Marxism began its evolution with this very problem, and it must remain centered on it if socialism is to be understood correctly as a human matter. Within the framework of Marxist tradition, the question is not whether philosophy is entitled to deal with the individual fate, but why this problem has been neglected during the development of Marxism.

At least two different categories of causes have been influential: 1) the removal of individual problems from the foreground by the potent and demanding needs of the revolutionary movement of masses, preempting all efforts, and 2) an increasing suspicion and dislike of these problems resulting from the fact that they have been increasingly exploited by political and ideological movements of reactionary forces which used them to fight Marxism and the revolutionary movement. The first category of causes has been losing its impact as socialism has been gaining strength, but the second category, on the contrary, has been growing constantly more important. It deserves to be discussed in more details.

The political and ideological appraisal of any phenomenon must not be identified with an instinctive psychological reaction in the sense of sympathy or antipathy. This principle applies particularly to the field of scientific and philosophical analysis.

No scientific or philosophical problem should be condemned because it was first stated or exploited by an active adversary. This principle is self-evident in the field of technique and natural sciences. Despite some appearances, the situation is the same in the field of philosophy, and the failure to observe there this principle is both irrational and harmful. When an important philosophical problem appears within the framework of an idealist system (which often happened in the past, especially insofar as the active role of the mind in the process of knowledge is concerned), the only conclusion which ought to be drawn is that this problem must be transferred with utmost speed on the ground of the materialistic system, and thus be changed in content. If he rejects an important problem because of its idealistic origin, a materialistic philosopher will only strengthen his adversary and weaken his own position. This result is even clearer when, for one reason or another, the enemy position monopolizes the theoretical exploitation of the problem. Such a situation only shows us that we have been indifferent and passive in the given field. In consequence we should not accuse the problem, but ourselves.

It is true that problems of the individual, and especially those of his freedom and active role in social life, have been exploited by

idealistic schools (by existencialism in particular) in order to attack Marxism both objectively and subjectively. But what conclusion should we draw from this fact?

In the first place, that we made a mistake when we surrendered such an important and valuable category of problems to our ideological enemies by failing to discuss it or underestimating it.

In the second place, that this mistake must be remedied as quickly as possible through a large scale discussion of these problems, justified at least by two considerations:

Primo: Because it is necessary for a full reflection of the world in Marxist theory. It is true that this theory teaches that the problem of individuals can only be solved in terms of the larger social background, and that the knowledge of laws governing the social life constitutes a basic condition for the proper approach and solution of that problem, but this theory never stated that the knowledge of laws of social development exhausted the problems of individuals. As long as men die and fear death, lose their beloved and fear that loss, suffer physically and morally (and, in one form or another, this will take place as long as there are men), they will want to know not only the successive stages of social change but also how they should understand their personal matters and act. Any theory which claims to present a definite world view must answer these questions which partly determine this world view. The silent are the losers, and it is their own fault.

Secondo: Because the struggle for the minds of men, waged between Marxism and idealistic schools, can only be won when the problems under discussion are accepted and a different, Marxist solution is presented. Not a nihilistic but an affirmative criticism is the only effective criticism. For that reason, and also because of the additional political implications of the dispute in progress, Marxist philosophy ought to undertake the study of the neglected and yet so popular problems of the individual and his fate, and must do so fast and on a large scale.

II. On the Meaning of Life

Only sociology and social psychology can explain why a philosopher is faced today continuously, but especially during meetings with youth, with the question: what is the meaning of life? I must admit that the frequency and the stubbornness with which this question is asked not only forced me to think about this problem but also to change my own attitude toward it.

For many years I have specialized in the criticism of neo-positivism, and I am still dealing in it in one way or another. However, as it often happens, among all non-Marxist philosophical schools this specific trend is the one which is closest to me in its way of thinking and the striving for the precision of verbal formulations. This is why I grant so much importance to the criticism of erroneous assumptions and mistaken conclusions presented by neo-positivism in various fields. Yet

I share the dislike of neo-positivism for a purely verbal speculation and metaphysics which, subjectively at least, was at the origin of the creation of the "Viennese Club." I literally hurt when I hear vague considerations on the subject of "an attitude of despair," "the meaning of life," etc. I mention this fact because, at least insofar as the "meaning of life" is concerned, I am ready to undertake a self-criticism. I have not changed my mind about the widespread vagueness prevailing in that field, but facts have convinced me that this question demands an answer. The worst type of philosophy is an ivory tower philosophy. If philosophy is to satisfy social needs, it must answer questions asked and representing social demand. If the problem is vague, we must try to make it more precise; if it is burdened by a wrong metaphysical tradition, we must try to get rid of these deceiving elements. But the refusal to answer questions which obviously worry large masses of people represents an incorrect attitude. A philosopher who does not notice the social need for a concrete philosophical problem is very severely punished: he is alienated from the contemporary atmosphere and no longer can act on it.

There is not the slightest doubt that the need for problems a la "meaning of life" is now particularly strong. I remember well my meeting with students in the Jelonka settlement. After my lecture on the subject of world view, I was asked many questions concerning ethics, and, among them, the most frequent was the question asking about the meaning of life. One listener suddenly said: "Please do not get angry, but could you explain, in terms of your own experience, what is the meaning of life?" At first I did get irritated, believing that he wanted to make fun of the lecturer! But when I looked at the student and a few hundred pairs of eyes observing me in all earnestness I immediately understood that this matter was really serious. This fact was confirmed by the silence in which they listened to my explanations. I must admit that I was thinking aloud and had to think very quickly. For always before I used to reject such problems as unworthy of philosophical attention. That evening, however, I recognized their value, or at least the need for the examination of these problems and for some answers. And I believed so as a Marxist, and from the Marxist viewpoint.

The criticism of neo-positivism and all other forms of analytical philosophy does not prevent one from accepting some of their concepts. Among others there is the notion that, as good common sense would indicate, a vague question must be first analyzed in order to reveal the true meaning of the statement or the various meanings which can be attributed to it. Of course this does not settle the problem but only constitutes a first step. But we must confess that such an analysis is already an achievement if it brings some clarity to the problem.

What then is the true meaning of those who, without much precision, and even sometimes quite vaguely, ask about the meaning of life? There are probably two main possible interpretations of that problem.

He who asks about the meaning of life, asks in the first place about the value of life, i.e., whether it is worthwhile living or not.

This is an old question, regardless of the fact whether one sincerely thinks of drawing practical conclusions from a negative answer or only asks in order to be able to fuss a little. We can read in the Psalms that "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." And stoics said that people should not be comforted against the inevitability of death but rather convinced that they should keep on living.

Whatever the approach, the fact remains that death is the main incentive for reflections over the meaning of life. I mean the threatening personal death and even more the death of someone close. Indeed, despite the unquestionable fear experienced by men in face of death, they often react much stronger to the absence created by the death of a person close. Man is afraid of his own death but views it only as a possibility, whereas the death of someone close is experienced as a real fact in its full dreadful aspect. In fact, it is only the death of another man which makes man realize the reality of his own death. Otherwise, if man were to live in a constant awareness of the unavoidably approaching death, he would certainly get crazy. A condition of normal life is that the flow of time (which can be compared to the flow of blood escaping through a wound) is only experienced in its full meaning during some exceptional moments. Nicolas Kuzmicz, in Rilke's "Notes," became unable to live when he realized that time flows and what it means.

The question: "Is it worthwile living" is thus forced upon us by death which, through its inevitability, questions all efforts and projects of the individual viewed with the framework of individual life as the frame of reference of appraisals and evaluation. But suffering, both physical and moral, especially when it is not deserved, also brings us to the question: "Is it worthwhile? Why should we suffer?"

We understand now better the background of this version of the question: "What is the meaning of life?" which corresponds to the question: "Is it worthwhile living?" But how shall we answer it? And how shall we justify our answer so that it might convince the others?

Of course we are interested in an affirmative answer which states the following conviction: although death is unavoidable, and although sufferings are unavoidable, especially when they are caused by the death of someone close, nevertheless it is worthwhile living, and in that sense life has a meaning. But why? We must answer that question too if we want to convince the others and if we do not want that our statement remains the expression of unjustified personal feelings.

It is now that we fully realize how unsafe is the ground upon which we advance, and how different become the ways of reasoning not only by comparison with applied or empirical sciences but also by comparison with gnoseological or ontological problems based on specific sciences. In deductive sciences we can speak of certitudes and in empirical sciences of probabilities which differ by the degree of justification but are always based on facts. This character also marks scientific philosophy, though in different forms and to a different degree.

But the situation is completely different in the case in which we are now interested: it is not the question of observing the truth or falsity of a statement, but a question of appraisal and evaluation. In this field the very possibility of a justified transition from the description to the appraisal is controversial. It is quite questionable whether a true description entitles automatically to derive any evaluation. I do not intend here to discuss theoretical problems which belong to axiology, but I want to stress the different nature of problems with which we are faced, and hence the additional difficulties which we must expect.

A neo-positivist would get startled at this point and would say that my statements and evaluation cannot be reduced to facts which can be verified, and that I am threatened with the subjectivism of my appraisals. And he will certainly be right. But all the same time he will be wrong, if he states on this basis that my problems are pseudo-problems, and tries to prevent me from dealing with them. In such a case, indeed, he would assume first what must be demonstrated, i.e., he would accept, by definition, the very criterion of meaningfulness and scientific character which in advance condemns the validity of the problems.

In fact a philosopher who discusses the problem of, say, the meaning of life proceeds quite differently than a philosopher who studies methods of natural sciences. He must act differently, because he is forced to do so by the very object of his interest. But this does not mean at all that his way of proceding is forbidden or unscientific. He, too, generalizes the facts of experience, and he, too, uses data provided by specific sciences, such as psychology, sociology, etc. His behavior is different in that, as we stated above, he does not simply describe, but appraises and evaluates. And whenever one appraises and evaluates, one uses some appraising criteria and some selected system of values. Of course this selection is not free but socially conditioned. But the social determination does not exhaust the problems. A certain role is played also by other factors, including psychological and physiological factors, which are related to the given individual and thus introduce clearly an individual factor. This happens, in one form or another, whenever it is a matter of choice, the choice of a world view included. By the same occasion, not only the intellectual factor is playing a role, but also the factor of emotions, and thus the subjective element clearly appears on the stage in a much more important part than in the case of considerations in the field of, say, methodology of natural sciences.

This is why the very process of generalization is different here. The distance between the empirically observed facts and the philosophical generalization is greater, and hence there is a greater possibility of different interpretations and different views. In this field the philosopher proceeds somehow like an ancient wise man who engages in considerations on the subject of human life, rather than like an experimenting natural scientist. The reason is simple: the method of an

experimental natural scientist would be here of little help: the field of reflection is different, and, at least as long as our knowledge does not improve (and I doubt that any progress of knowledge would ever change anything in that field), it cannot be investigated with methods of applied or natural sciences. It is obviously a pity. I should personally also prefer that something surer and more certain could be said about this field. But it is impossible. Yet this unfortunate fact neither eliminates the problem nor diminishes its importance. The person who becomes "irrated" at the imprecise and unsure character of this problem, and turns away from it on the ground of faithfulness to scientific principles, will be defeated by an adversary who will take care of the problem, even if he changes sometimes completely its character. Besides, there is no recipe for a "general" approach to various problems of investigation. Only one principle must be applied: the individual problems must be approached in the most scientific way possible, defined by the level of knowledge reached in the given field. Therefore a philosopher who deals with the meaning of life ought to limit himself to the presentation of certain choices of solutions, realizing that the subject does not allow for a single and authoritative solution. We do not have here a scientific philosophy, but neither do we have, as the neo-positivists believed, a non-scientific philosophy. Such an antithesis is simply nonsensical because we find ourselves in the realm of philosophy which cannot be qualified in this manner. From a logical viewpoint, we could as well state that since love is not square it must be non-square. We said above that the philosopher who reflects over problems such as the meaning of life proceeds like an ancient wise man. A wise man and a scientist are not one and the same. Wisdom and science go usually together but are not synonomous. A scientist has acquired the knowledge about a field of reality, he is an erudite. A wise man is only an intelligent man who has had much experience, especially in problems concerning the behavior of other people. One can even state, and facts will confirm it, that a man can be an erudite scientist in some specialized field, and yet not be wise in the meaning of general intelligence or in the meaning of life experience and ability to behave appropriately in his relations with other people. Conversely, one can be wise, a popular wise man, without erudition, i.e., education in a special field. The philosopher approaches the problem under discussion like a wise man and not like an erudite scientist, and his reasoning may be qualified as "wise-not wise," "useful for people -- useless," etc., but not "scientific-unscientific." There is nothing disqualifying in this fact: we are concerned with a different field of investigations. In some situations, men need most a man who has the wisdom of experience. Therefore the philosopher must not only be an educated but also a wise man. But the question of scientific nature is not completely eliminated. Knowledge, be it knowledge of some specific type, helps to think about the human life and the ways of acting toward men. The solution of questions such as "what is the meaning of life?" depends on many factors, but in the first place on the world view of the individual who is reflecting over these questions. And here we find the

relation to views which can be qualified as scientific or unscientific. However, let us repeat that we cannot directly refer the qualification "scientific view" or "unscientific view" neither to the positive thesis that life has a meaning nor to the negative thesis that life has no meaning, and therefore is not worthwhile living.

But let us return to our original question: what answer can be given to the question about the meaning of life, such as we have clarified it, and how can this answer be justified?

This obviously depends on the context of the philosophical system which is used as frame of reference. We stated, indeed, that the view on the problem under discussion depends on many factors, but in the first place on the world view of the person who is giving the answer.

When one is a believer in God, the solution is very simple: life has always a meaning (i.e., that it is worthwhile living under all conditions) because even death, pain and sufferings agree with the intention of a superior being which prepares a reward in life after death or else punishes in this earthly manner some guilty action. I must admit that, like in many cases, here too it is very convenient to be a believer in God: the most complicated matters become very simple. But the price of this convenience is tremendous -- it is the scientific attitude. This is why it is increasingly more difficult to afford the "luxury" of this convenience and simplicity of solutions.

Within the framework of a secular world view, whatever the specific philosophical position, it is impossible to answer this question about the meaning of life in a general and universally valid manner. The appraisal whether it is worthwhile living in a concrete case depends in effect on a concrete appraisal of conditions and perspectives of life; and here the last word always belongs to the given individual whose life is in question. The appraisal must indeed include all the individually known and felt factors which can only be balanced and summed by the individual, and no one else. The environment can only help the individual to balance the positive and negative elements, reminding the individual of all that entails a positive evaluation of life and which the individual, under the impact of an emotion, can forget, to wit: that one lives only once, that time softens sufferings, that there are duties toward society and persons close, etc. But that is all, nothing else can be done. If one does not accept absolute moral imperatives, which are actually essentially religious whether one admits or not the existence of supernatural beings, one cannot decide in advance the answer of the given individual, i.e., choose for that individual, since no one else can make the choice. One can only say: "In your place, I would make such and such choice." But that is all.

On the other hand, when one asks what is the meaning of life, one also asks what is the purpose of life, i.e., why do we live. This problem is related to the former (since the answer to the question whether it is worthwhile living is closely linked to the manner in which one answers the question about the purpose of life), but is not quite the same. Practically it provides a more important and more interesting interpretation of the question about the meaning of life.

This question is asked by everyone who is worried by the problem of how he ought to live. Our behavior, especially in difficult circumstances and cases of conflict, depends on the purpose which we give to life, and hence on the way in which we set the hierarchy of values of what we can achieve through action or cessation of action. I am obviously referring here to men who reflect over these matters. There are cases when personal patterns are followed spontaneously as the result of education in the widest meaning of that word, but even in these cases the problem of the meaning of life and specific solutions is felt, if indirectly. Such solutions, indeed, are not only found in treatises and scholarly discussions but also in the practical behavior of a hero who sacrifices his life for the sake of some ideals, a traitor who cooperates with the enemy for money, a fighter for truth who sacrifices for its sake his personal interests, an opportunist who agrees with his superiors despite his personal beliefs to the contrary, etc.

When someone asks us about the meaning of life in the sense that he wants an answer to the question: "what main purpose must be followed in life so that all other actions and choices be subordinated to it," in other terms "how must one live," he actually asks us to express our opinion on this subject and the reasons which support it. This situation is different than in the previous case when we were asked to make a decision for someone in a matter where he alone has the right to decide. In the case now under consideration, not only I am able to answer the question, since it concerns my position, but I can and must defend the causes which support it, and engage in a sort of propaganda on their behalf.

Again we must first distinguish between the religious and secular viewpoints because not only they are different but are located on two completely different spiritual levels.

In the framework of faith, the problem here too becomes very simple and the solution is most "convenient": man is exempted from thinking since he is to accept heteronomical norms, i.e., norms from without, imposed by God, and requiring obedience on the part of man. These norms give to man the purpose of a rightful life, i.e., teach him the meaning of life in the sense in which we are interested. And that is it. There are no problems but only the need for exegesis aiming at a better understanding of the intentions contained in God's norms given by revelation. Some arguments could be advanced here in support of the thesis to the effect that these norms were created by man, since not God creates man but man creates gods in his image. But if one's mind is closed to rational statements, or if one is stubborn enough to reject them on emotional grounds, then no arguments can help: they are assumed in advance to be false by a man who believes in revelation. Despite this fact there is only one way left for us: we must constantly show contradictions between scientific and religious positions and stress the necessity of making a choice between them. Such an action becomes more effective as the culture and education of masses improve. In my opinion it is the only efficient way of fighting the religious superstition on a large scale. But as long as one is stubbornly attached to the

religious solution of the problem, we can only tell him that it is not acceptable for people who do not want to abandon the scientific position, and that it is beyond the domain of intellectual discussion.

When we come to secular attempts to answer the question about the meaning of life, we find that these are eternal and typical problems of philosophy and therefore they have been long ago classified according to types of all possible positions which they can entail. Insofar as the general characteristics of attitudes and behaviors are concerned, it is difficult to invent something new besides some new names. I am even inclined to agree with Ben Akib that there is nothing new under the sun. But then I would be wrong. For if we do not limit ourselves to abstract and general characteristics, and study more thoroughly the social conditions of the implementation of a specific purpose of action, the situation changes radically. When, as a Marxist, I believe that the main principle of action, resulting from the purpose in which I believe, is socialist humanism, I can find my place under the heading "social eudemonism" (interpreted in a specific way), but at the same time I see some specific conditions which differentiate my position from other cases of this category of positions. I also find the relation between my convictions in that field and my general world view, i.e., Marxism in the widest meaning of that term.

I stressed above the relation between the answer to questions a la "what is the meaning of life?" and the world view of the author of the given answer. This relation, however, is not a simple dependency in the sense that a materialist chooses the altruistic attitude, an idealist an egotistical attitude, or conversely. Any of these various positions, social eudemonism included, can be upheld both by supporters of materialism and idealism, believers in a dynamic and static concept of the world, etc. Tens and hundreds of examples can be drawn from the long history of the problem to prove this point. As a matter of fact these positions will be characterized only in an abstract and general way, referring to ideal types, and therefore apt to be interpreted in many different ways in their concrete embodiments. Pure altruism in true life is as fictitious as pure egotism.

As I stated before, the supporters of various ontological and epistemological theories may advocate sincerely the theory of social eudemonism, i.e., the view that the purpose of human life is the striving for individual happiness can be achieved (I consider that the view according to which social eudemonism can be assimilated to some form of utilitalism is both erroneous and historically unjustified). Socialist humanism, on the other hand, can only be advocated by a Marxist. Indeed, although this latter view can be placed under the heading of "social eudemonism" (with a specific interpretation of that term, of course, since it is rather vague and undetermined otherwise and may be interpreted in many different ways), it is no longer a question of a general statement, which can be subscribed by supporters of many different theories, but a concretized concept which is so closely related to the other theses of the system that its recognition implies the

recognition of the whole system, with the result that it can only be subscribed by persons who accept the whole system.

Theses of socialist humanism and its directives for action stem from specific theoretical concepts. In the first place, it is the matter of a specific concept of the individual as a social creation (as "the totality of social relations" -- we shall return to this point), which entails the clarification of human attitudes and their evolution; in the second place, it is the matter of a specific concept of the relation of the individual to society, based on the concept of social development presented by historical materialsim; in the third place, it is a matter of the conviction, related to historical materialism, that ideals can be carried out only in appropriate social conditions, and that they become utopias under different conditions.

In consequence, we do not have a superficial view and utopic wishes but a combination of scientifically justified theoretical views which result in determined practical conclusions in the form of directives for action.

The believer in socialist humanism is convinced that he can attain happiness only through the happiness of society, because only the enlargement of the field of individual development and the possibility of satisfying various strivings of people on a social scale create a solid basis for individual strivings. Yet he does not limit himself to a general advocation of universal friendship or love of the others, although these principles are most dear to him and their violation makes him suffer. The believer in socialist humanism understands that the realization of his postulates requires fighting, and that the cause which he serves is socially determined and requires a determined change in social relations. He approaches antagonistic societies in terms of the relation between the realization of his postulates and the change in property relations and the resulting class relations. He advocates class struggle in the name of the love for others and universal friendship, and, paradoxical as it might seem, he advocates hatred against the oppressors of man in the name of the love for man. He believes in dialectics, and therefore he fights all the while advocating peace. His socialist ideal is most closely related to his concept of humanism, and hence comes the term "socialist humanism." Socialism as an ideal is the logical expression of this humanism, but is also an embodiment of the ideals of this humanism. The believer in socialist humanism is ready to sacrifice everything in the name of these ideals, and he is therefore entitled to advocate sacrifice and require it from others. He is solidary with the general slogan of love for the others, but he has scorn for those who repeat this beatiful slogan aloud but betray it in their actions. Socialist humanism not only entails some definite views, it also requires that one fights for the realization of these views. And it also, and above all perhaps, forces one to fight to convince other people that socialist humanism is right and that they must change their attitude.

Is this social eudemonism? In a sense, yes. But such definition does not state anything concrete. It is a matter of a logical system of

views which, in its given form, is only possible on the basis of Marxism, and in turn provides the foundations for Marxism. The fact whether one is a Marxist or not has thus a tremendous importance for the solution of the most important question about the meaning of life. Only a Marxist, indeed, can speak for the highest form of humanism: socialist humanism.

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